

■ DUXBURY HISTORY FILE
REFERENCE

John H. Cutler dead at 88

Duxbury Clipper publisher found in swimming pool

By Elizabeth W. Crowley
The Patriot Ledger

DUXBURY — John H. Cutler, 88, of Duxbury, co-founder and publisher of the Duxbury Clipper weekly newspaper and a chronicler of Massachusetts political history, was found dead yesterday in his swimming pool at home.

Duxbury police said it appeared he had drowned.

Rescue workers were called to Cutler's home at 53 Surplus St. at about 5:40 p.m. Cutler wasn't breathing when he was pulled from the pool. He was pronounced dead at Jordan Hospital in Plymouth.

There was no indication of foul play, police said. An autopsy was scheduled for today.

Cutler started the Duxbury Clipper in 1950 with his wife, Roberta "Bobbie" (Sumner) Cutler. She died in 1995. The couple had been married for 54 years.

In an interview shortly after his wife's death, Cutler said the idea for the paper grew out of a conversation during a bridge game. One of the players remarked about a ham and bean supper that a local church had just held and commented on the lack of a newspaper in Duxbury to chronicle such events. "Why don't you start a newspaper, John?" asked the friend.



File photo

John H. Cutler of Duxbury was co-founder of the Duxbury Clipper weekly newspaper and a chronicler of the state's political history.

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■ CUTLER

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During the drive home, Bobbie Cutler said: "That's a good idea. Let's do it." The couple started the paper with \$461.

For the next 10 years, the Cutlers produced the newspaper on their dining room table and developed it into a must-read for Duxbury residents.

"As kids, we watched our parents put the newspaper out each week from our home until they finally got an office," David S. Cutler of Norwell said.

As he did six days a week for almost 50 years, John Cutler went to work at the newspaper on Wednesday. He worked at a desk on which books were piled high. He was a voracious reader.

He read his own newspaper most closely. Cutler reviewed every word of copy before it appeared in print in the Clipper.

He delighted in the fact that an average of 4,000 copies of the paper were sold each week in a town with fewer than 5,000 households, a colleague said.

"He was extremely proud of the Duxbury Clipper and of what it meant to the town," the newspaper's managing editor, Paula Maxwell, said. "He felt a good hometown newspaper should be like a menu, offering something of interest to everyone who read it. People feel like it is their newspaper. It is a mirror of the town."

In recent years, the Clipper faced competition from two other weeklies,

The Reporter, published by Memorial Press Group of Plymouth, a subsidiary of Newspaper Media LLC, which also publishes The Patriot Ledger, and The Mariner, which is published by the Fidelity Investments-owned Community Newspaper Corp. of Needham.

The family-owned Clipper was "up for the fight," Maxwell said. Cutler was able to retain the paper's advertisers and continued to attract subscribers from every state and several foreign countries.

"He was very proud of that as well, that people who had grown up in Duxbury and had moved away still wanted to stay in touch with the community through the Clipper," Maxwell said. "He didn't mind bragging about the Clipper."

David Cutler, who founded the Marshfield-based Mariner Newspaper group and sold it to Capital Cities/ABC Inc. of New York in 1989, said the Clipper will remain a locally owned, independent business.

"It will stay in the family," he said yesterday. "It's not going to be sold."

The younger Cutler, a former reporter and State House bureau chief for The Patriot Ledger, publishes a small daily and five weekly papers in southwestern Worcester County.

John Cutler was raised in the Fenway section of Boston and was an avid fan of his neighborhood team, the Red Sox. Fenway Park was a three-minute walk from his boyhood home.

He graduated from Boston Latin School and Harvard College. He earned a doctorate in literature from Harvard in 1936. While teaching

Spanish at Dartmouth College, Cutler became a syndicated columnist.

He entered the Army before the outbreak of war in 1941 and was transferred to the Navy after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He served in Brazil for 13 months and continued writing, becoming the official historian of Fleet Air Wing 16. He was editor of the South Atlantic News during his stint in the military.

Cutler was appointed to the U.S. Embassy and later assigned to a writing unit at the Navy Department in Washington. He wrote vivid eyewitness accounts of the battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

Cutler was teaching languages at Boston University in 1950 when he and his wife decided to start their newspaper.

He wrote books throughout his career at the newspaper, in part to help finance the Clipper. He was the ghostwriter of James Michael Curley's autobiography, "I'd Do It Again!"

He also wrote "Honey Fitz: Three Steps to the White House," about John Fitzgerald, the former Boston mayor and maternal grandfather of John F. Kennedy; "Cardinal Cushing of Boston"; and "Ed Brooke: Biography of a Senator."

Cutler was quoted by The Boston Herald in 1979 as saying that writing brought him fulfillment.

"I never wrote primarily for money. I wanted to know people who did things, and just look at the people I've met."

He also wrote two books about being the publisher of a small town New England newspaper. "Put It On

the Front Page Please" and its sequel, "Cancel My Subscription Please," earned Duxbury and the Duxbury Clipper admirers far beyond the town borders.

In 1992, Cutler turned his reporter's eye for unsparing detail on himself with his memoir, "Make the Bold Move."

In the book, Cutler reflected on a life filled with fascinating people, places and events. He also took an unflinching look at the tragedies in his life, including the murder of his mother-in-law by his 16-year-old son John and John's suicide in 1987.

In a chapter titled, "A Temporary Setback," Cutler wrote of his own suicide attempt in 1989, when he jumped into his pool with a weight tied around his neck. He was rescued but was in a coma for two weeks.

Cutler made a full recovery but wrote in his book, "I still don't understand what happened to me that day."

John Cutler donated money and his time to countless Duxbury institutions. He established annual scholarships for Duxbury High School students in his son John's name. And a reading room at the local library was dedicated in the memory of his wife.

Cutler is survived by two sons, Robert B. Cutler of Kingston and David S. Cutler of Norwell; two daughters, Margaret C. Chandler of Silver Spring, Md., and Abigail R. Cutler of Duxbury; and four grandchildren.

Funeral arrangements have not been announced.